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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND LFREEMAN AND INR JYAPHE

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SUBJECT: BACK TO THE FUTURE: YEMEN'S SOUTHERN MOVEMENT
SPLITS BETWEEN OLD RIVALS

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Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Supporters of the Southern Movement appear increasingly polarized between fierce political rivals from the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen - President Ali Nasser Mohammed and Vice President Ali Salim al-Beidh. While Ali Nasser and his followers remain publicly supportive of a federalized solution under the umbrella of unity, Beidh has led his supporters) most prominent among them Tariq al-Fadhli - down an increasingly violent, pro-secession road.

Since August, influential Yemenis from both the north and the south have increased their efforts to bring the two leaders and their respective factions together in order to increase political pressure on President Saleh. If unresolved, this decades-old rivalry will continue to weaken the southerners' chances for winning hoped-for concessions from the ROYG. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) Private comments and public statements by Southern Movement members suggest the group's increasing polarization into two factions) one allied with former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) President Ali Nasser Mohammed and the second with former PDRY Vice President Ali Salim al-Beidh. The two men have a long history of conflict: Beidh kicked Ali Nasser out of the PRDY in 1986 after a bloody civil war; Ali Nasser's 1990 departure from North Yemen was one of Beidh's conditions for uniting the two countries (reftel). Both have been living in exile) Beidh in Muscat and, recently, Europe and Nasser in Damascus and Cairo) for much of the last 20 years. As the Southern Movement has evolved, its fractious supporters have rallied around the two exiled leaders, each with a distinct view on the future of southern Yemen.

¶3. (S) To date, Ali Nasser and his backers) among them prominent Yemeni businessman Salman al-Mashdali, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mohammed Ali al-Shadadi, Abyan MP Salem Mansour al-Haydare and Shebwa MP Ali Yaslim Bawda al-Himyari - have publicly supported the unity of Yemen. Ali Nasser has carefully portrayed himself as the more moderate alternative, suggesting a federalized system with greater local authority as the key to increasing stability. By virtue of their milder rhetoric, Ali Nasser's clique enjoys greater freedom to travel throughout the country; many of his supporters, while southerners by origin, live in Sana'a and have frequent contact with ROYG officials. Other leaders who are not members of the Southern Movement have begun to champion Ali

Nasser's ideas. Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) Secretary General Yassin Sayyid Noman) who hard-core movement members criticize for being too conciliatory with the ROYG - told PolOff in October that Yemen's political future lay in a federal system. Noman and Islah leader Hamid al-Ahmar met with Ali Nasser in Amman on November 12 to explore possible cooperation with the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), according to British diplomats. Northerners Sinan and Mohammed Abulahoum, Bakil tribal leaders frequently critical of President Saleh, consider Ali Nasser to be a close friend and sometimes political ally.

14. (S) Beidh - who uses the inflammatory title President of the Democratic Republic of Yemen - calls openly for secession and has led his followers down an increasingly violent path of resistance. He reportedly sees himself as the rightful leader of southern Yemen and has lobbied for meetings with American, British and German officials. According to Beidh supporter and Southern Movement leader General Mohammed Saleh Tammah, Beidh will accept political and financial support from any country) from the U.S. to Iran - if it helps his cause. Beidh's confrontational attitude has incensed and worried the ROYG. His supporters in Yemen) most prominent among them former regime insider turned Southern Movement leader Tariq al-Fadhli) have echoed his anti-Saleh rhetoric and moved to increasingly violent protest, enabled by the thousands of former mujahideen and tribesmen at Fadhli's disposal. (Note: Beidh's backers are largely confined to Abyan governorate and unable to travel, even to the nearby city of Aden, for fear of arrest. End Note.) In December, the Supreme Security Council accused Beidh of supporting and financing al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and asked

foreign nations for his extradition. (Note: The ROYG now refers to the movement as "the al-Qaeda/Southern Movement." Beidh and other movement members have adamantly denied any links to AQAP. End Note.)

15. (S) Beginning in August, a series of meetings have taken place in a range of Arab capitals with the goal of reconciling old grievances between Ali Nasser and Beidh and their respective factions. Influential northern Yemenis often critical of President Saleh) including the Abulahoums, Ahmar and previous insiders such as former Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Basenduah) have played a key role in these reconciliation efforts. These disaffected northern leaders view the nascent Southern Movement, if shaped and directed appropriately, as a powerful tool with which to pressure the regime to reform) or step down. In late November, according to local media reports, Beidh signaled a move toward reconciliation, announcing that after a series of coordination meetings, he felt confident of "the integration of the efforts of the people of the south and their will to achieve the purpose of independence." Lebanese media reported that Ali Nasser and Beidh met on December 22 in Beirut) their first face-to-face encounter since Ali Nasser and his supporters fled the PDRY in 1986. The outcome of the reunion, however, remains in question. An American political consultant working for Ali Nasser told the Ambassador in January that Ali Nasser was considering returning to Sana'a in May as the sole symbol of the unified opposition to the Saleh regime.

COMMENT

16. (S) Although support for secession is increasing across the south (a recent study by a local polling organization put it at 70 percent) the Southern Movement's leaders will be unable to take advantage of the trend until they are able to put aside the factional infighting that has crippled southern politics since the end of British rule in 1967. However, if Ali Nasser and Ali Salim al-Beidh) both of whom stand as powerful symbols of an independent southern identity - are able to put aside 25 years of mistrust and reconcile their significant differences, they could form a powerful front with which to challenge President Saleh to seriously address the legitimate grievances now troubling the southern

governorates. END COMMENT.
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